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ABSTRACT

A significant number of Hispanic children's books and juvenile short stories and novels produced in the last two decades reveal the social and cultural elements that affect the lives, traditions, and beliefs of young adults from Spanish-speaking countries. These books contain sociocultural realism, yet with a touch of the innocence and freshness of children and young adults. This combination of realism and vivid imagination makes this kind of literature powerful. In this article, a selection of the literature is compiled, selected for the significance of content, richness in cultural value, and interest to child and young-adult readers. The authors are from Spain, Cuba, Argentina, Mexico, and the United States. The literary works can be presented in numerous ways: as a base for research on Hispanic children's/juvenile literature; as a part of a cultural readings course offered to Spanish teachers; as a part of a seminar or advanced-level course offered to Spanish teachers; or as a part of a Spanish curriculum in both high school and university programs. It is hoped that this selection of contemporary Spanish children's and juvenile literature will provide a framework to increase the role that such works play in the research, teaching, and learning of Spanish. (Contains 84 references.) (KFT)

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Hispanic Children's/Juvenile Literature: A Selection for Spanish Teachers

by
Marcela Ruiz-Funes
East Carolina Univeristy
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Abstract: A significant number of Hispanic children's/juvenile short novels produced in the last two decades reveal the social and cultural elements that affect the lifes, traditions, and beliefs of young adults from Spanish-speaking countries. These books contain socio-cultural realism, yet with a touch of the innocence and freshness of children and young adults. It is this combination of realism and vivid imagination that makes this kind of literature a powerful one. In this article a selection was compiled considering significance of content, richness in cultural value, and interest to young-adult readers. The authors are from Spain, Cuba, Argentina, and Mexico-USA, countries where children's/juvenile literature has a leading role.

Key words: Hispanic children's/juvenile literature, socio-cultural realism, cultural value, young-adult readers.

Some Salient Historical Aspects[1]

It was not until the second half of the 20th century that a considerable number of prominent Hispanic writers began creating original literary works in Spanish for children and young adults. Before then, during the 18th century, Samaniego and Iriarte's fables (Spain) were an exception--they indeed were pioneers and influenced children's literature in Hispanic America. Likewise, interest in this literary category by both Spanish and Latin American critics is also recent. It was not until the 1980's and with the special stimulus provided by the International Year of the Child, that critics paid more attention to children's/ juvenile literature (*Revista Monográfica* 5). In the following section some of the most salient aspects in this type of literature from Spain, Cuba, Argentina, and Mexico-USA are presented.

Spain

When tracing the origins of children's/ juvenile literature from Spain, we need to refer back to the 12th century and acknowledge el *Romancero*, particulary "El Romace del Conde Olinos" and "El Romance de Rosaflorida" (Rodriguez Puértolas). These works

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contained the content, rhythm, and simplicity appropriate for children, however, they were originally created for an adult audience because:

> *... los adultos tenían psicología de niños y necesitaban escuchar las proezas y los sucesos en rimas fáciles y sencillas, en formas claras y populares ... (Bravo-Villasante, 1983 16).*

Similarly, the stories of "El Conde Lucanor" or "Libro de Patronio", (Juan Manuel-1282-1349) were created for the enjoyment of adults, yet they were also amused by children. These works were educative in form and had a moral intention to influence the minds of the reader. These works were important because they extended from Spain into the rest of Europe during the Middle Ages.

With the invention of the press during the Rennaisance, *Aesop's Fables* were published in Spain in 1489 and the "Exemplario contra los engaños y peligros del mundo" (version of the arabic "Calila Diman") in 1493. Both of these writings became popular in Spain and were read by children and adults alike.

In the 1500's, a number of *Cartillas* and *Abecedarios* as well as books of chivalry were published. During this time *La vida del Lazarillo de Tormes y de sus fortunas y adversidades* (Rico) was enjoyed by a wide audience. This book represents one of the first ones to have a child as the protagonist.

The 16th and 17th centuries are characterized by children's folklore with authors such as Rodrigo Cano's (1573-1647) *Días geniales o Lúdricos*, Juan Rufo's (1547-1620) *Carta*, and Luis de Góngora's (1561-1627) *Hermana Marica*. At the same time, during the 17th century the famous stories by Charles Perrault (France, 1628-1703)—*Piel de Asno*, *Pulgarcito*, *El Gato con Botas*, *La Cenicienta*, *Caperucita Roja*—gained prominnece in Spain.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the fables of Félix María Samaniego—*Fábulas completas* (1781) and those of Tomás de Iriarte—*Fábulas literarias* (1782) are noteworthy in Spain. In addition, during this time "El Pinocho español"—a Spanish adaptation of the Italian original—is also well received. This period is important because for the first time there is concern for the child as a reader. The pedagogical value of books is stressed.

In the 20th century the following writers outstand: María Luisa Gefaell with *La Hadas de Villaviciosa de Odón*, Concha Castroviejo

with *La Luna de Matías*, José María Sánchez Silva with *Marcelino Pan y Vino*, and Miguel Buñuel with *El niño, la golondrina y el gato*. Classical writers are: Jacinto Benavente, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Ramón de Valle-Inclán, Fedrico García Lorca, and Ana María Matute. During the 1970's, children's/juvenile literature gained its definite impulse with the feminist movement's intent to discover and understand the effect that traditional children's stories have in the psycological and social developemnt of the child.

Cuba

The initial forms of Cuban children's/juvenile literature followed the model of those of Spanish writers being the fable predominant during the 18th and 19th centuries. The Cuban fables depicted typical Cuban animals and vegetables such as "el majá, el tabaco, el carpintero, el cao" and were animated with a creole "zumba". In addition, Cuban fables contained both morale and humor, yet the humorous element was accentuated. These characteristics made these fables unique and different from those written by Spanish writers. Among the Cuban authors we should mention: Plácido, José María Heredia, José María de Cárdenas, Francisco Javier Balmaseda, and Aurelia Castillo de González.

The leading figure in Cuban children's and juvenile literature was José Martí (1853-1895). His intense devotion to children and his untiring fight for the freedom of men and freedom of the Cuban people led him to compose pieces that would delight the minds of curious children, youngsters, and adults as well. Before his death, Martí created the first Cuban periodical for children *La Edad de Oro* which contained works of Greek mythology, anthologies of universal work ("La historia del hombre contada por sus casas", "Cuentos de elefantes"), poetry ("Los dos príncipes"), fables ("Un juego nuevo y otros viejos"), among others (*Obras completas*). In an harmonious and delicate way, Martí presented in this periodical a scientifc and literary program that would educate and activate the imagination of young minds. He wrote about topics that would be of interest to both boys and girls because he believed that:

> *"...la niñas deben saber hablar con ellos como amigos cuando vayan creciendo ... Para los niños es este periódico, y para la niñas, por supuesto. Sin la niñas no se puede vivir, como no puede vivir la tierra sin luz".*

In 1882, Martí dedicated his book of poems *Ismailillo* to his son. With this book, Martí makes one of the riches contribution to Cuban juvenile literature.

Poetic folklore and popular stories also gained their place in Cuban literature. Concepción Teresa Alzola has compiled the rich folklore of the Cuban child in her book *Folklore del niño cubano*. Alzola and writers of other genres have become a significant source of children's and juvenile literature. Among these writer are: Herminio Almendros ("Oros viejos"), René Potts ("Romancero de la maestrilla"), Emilio Moreau Bacardi ("Cuentos de todas las noches"), Emma Pérez ("Isla con sol"), Hilda Perera Soto ("Cuentos de Apolo"), Renée Méndez Capote ("Memorias de una cubanita que nació con el siglo", "De la maravillosa historia de nuestra tierra"), Dora Alonso ("Aventuras de Guille en busca de la gaviota negra"), Mirta Aguirre ("Juegos y otros poemas"), and Nicolás Guillén ("Por el mar de las Antillas nada un barco de papel").

Argentina

During the 18th and early 19th centuries, Argentine children were exposed to writings that came from Spain or other parts of the world. Iriarte and Samaniego's fables were read and works such as "Las Mil y Una Noches" were highly popular.

The dominant figure in Argentine children's/juvenile literature was Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811-1888). A distinguished political figure and education advocate, Sarmiento's main interest was public education and the education of the children. During the mid 19th century, Sarmiento's main concern was the little exposure Argentine children had to literature. In his report: "Lectura sobre Bibliotecas Populares" and in his article: "Cuentos para niños", Sarmiento stressed the educative value of biographies of famous and honored men to young minds. For this reason and to serve as model, Sarmiento wrote a biography of his adoptive son-- "Vida de Dominguito" (1866)-- who died in the war with Paraguay.

José Hernández (1834-1886) is another leading figure in Argentine juvenile literature. He represents the "gaucho" element with his epic poem "Martín Fierro". This work has been the companion of many young men serving as role model during their adolescence. Another "gauchesco" writer is Hilario Ascasubi (1807-1875) author of "Santos Vega o los Mellizos de la Flor" and "Paulino Lucero o los gauchos del Río de la Plata".

Traditional and popular *Cancioneros*, and particularly, *Children's Cancioneros* are considered an important element in children's literature, particularly for their educative value. Among the many cancioneros, we need to mention: "Cancionero rioplatense" by Jorge Furt, "Cancionero popular cuyano" by Juan Draghi, "Coplas y cantares argentinos" by J. L. Lanuza, and "Canciones y danzas tradicionales para niños de las escuelas" by Isabel Aretz.

National folklore brought another rich aspect to children's literature. In this category the following authors outstand: Julio Aramburu with "El folklore en los niños" (1940) and "Las hazañas de Pedro de Urdemalas", Alberto Franco with "Leyendas de Tucumán" (1944), Susana Chertudi with "Cuentos folklóricos de la Argentina" (1960), and Jesús María Carrizo with "Cuentos de la tradición oral argentina".

A well-known and highly acclaimed author is María Elena Walsh who has distinguished herself for her vibrant, yet melodic poetry, songs, and theatrical performances. Her production starts in 1947 with *Otoño imperdonable* followed by *Apenas viaje* (1948), *Baladas con Angel* (1951), *Casi milagro* (1958), *Tutú Marambá* (1960), and *El reino del revés* (1963).

Within the realm of juvenile novel, the following writers are distinguished: Gustavo Martínez Zubiría 'Hugo Wast' with his first novel "Alegre", Benito Lynch with "El potrillo roano", Horacio Quiroga (original from Uruguay but wrote and published in Buenos Aires) with "Cuentos de la selva", and Ana María Berry with "Las aventuras de Celendín y otros cuentos".

Mexico-USA (and other Hispanic Americans)

A significant contribution to Hispanic children's/juvenile literature has been done by latino authors. Unfortunately, some of the work produced present an inaccurate picture of the culture and perpetuate steroetypes. Examples of this kind are: *... And Now Miguel* by Joseph Krumgold, *Pedro, the Angel of Olvera Street* and *Song of the Swallows* by Leo Poloti, *Nine Days to Christmas* by Marie Hall Ets. Although these books have received prestigious awards, they contribute little to our understanding of the modern Hispanic American culture. In the 1970's we begin to have books that fight the stereotypes promulgated in the 1940's. In these new books we see urbanized Hispanic Americans that face the challenges of the modern world. Three examples are: *The Girl from Puerto Rico* (1961) by Hila Colman, *Viva Chicano* (1970) by Frank Bonham,

and *The Maldonado Miracle* (1986) by Theodore Taylor. In the 1990's, among the most celebrated are *Baseball in April* (1990) and *A Fire in My Hands: A Book of Poems* (1990) by Gary Soto.

The Selection[2]

Among the kinds of children's/juvenile literature—Picture Storybooks, Folk Literature, Poetry, Fantasy, Biograpahy, and Contemporary and Historical Realism—the latter has become predominant in the last thirty years (Bravo Villasante, 1985). Because realistic fiction is set in the world as we know it and is intended to provide a believable verisimilitude to life, it allows the reader to learn about the societal circumstances that affect a person's life and his/her surroundings (Russell).

In this section a review is presented of four novels that are noteworthy for their socio-cultural realism. They are both rich in cultural references and language use. These novels are characterized by their expository clarity, simplicity of language structure, yet with abundance of words and expressions that reflect the speech of Hispanic young adults today. The four novels are: *Kike* (1984) by Hilda Perera, *Las Dos Marias* (1999) by Maria Inés Falconi, *Las Barbaridades de Bárbara* (1997) by Rosa Montero, and *The House on Mango Street* (1984) by Sandra Cisneros.

Kike

About the Author: Hilda Perera (Cuba), well-known Cuban writer, now lives in Miami, Florida. She has received numerous awards including "el Premio Lazarillo" both in 1975 and 1978 with *Cuentos Para Chicos y Grandes* and *Podria Ser Que Una Vez*. She is the author of *Cuentos de Apolo*, *Kike*, and *Mai*.

Kike presents the life of a Cuban boy, Kike, who is sent to Florida with his older brother to seek a more promising and happy future. Through the voice of Kike we experience the obstacles, problems, and adventures that he lives as he fights to define his own cultural identity. *Kike* is loaded with cultural, social, and historical references: Cuban family values and traditions, Cuba under Castro's regime, racial issues in the United States, and the lifestyle of Americans from different social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. All these elements affect Kike's formation of his own self as he matures to understand and accept his cultural roots.

This novel contains numerous words and expressions that have a strong cultural value: Ser gusano (no estar con la revolución), estar loco como una cabra (estar muy loco), dar sopapos (dar golples), compañero/a (miembro de la revolución cubana), irse a la porra (insulto=irse al diablo), ni pio (nada), Matecumbe (institución en los Estados Unidos a la que se enviaba a los niños cubanos exiliados), yagua (hoja de palma), bohio (vivienda tipica de los campesinos de Cuba), la mandamás (un persona que lo sabe todo), dar un patatús (dar un gople, perder conocimiento), *spic* (los latinos que hablan español en Estados Unidos), factoria (americanismo=fábrica).

Las Barbaridades de Bárbara

About the Author: Rosa Montero (Spain) is a renown Spanish journalist who writes for the periodical *El País* and directs its weekly edition. In 1980, Montero won the National Award in Journalism for her interviews and literary articles. Writer of numerous novels, Montero experimented writing children's literature for the first time with the well-received *Las Barbaridades de Bárbara*.

Las Barbaridades de Bárbara presents the life of a witty ten year-old Spanish girl who has a critical attitude towards her family, her friends, her school life, and adults in general. Through a number of different episodes we learn about the dynamics of middle-class Spanish families, the relationship with siblings, the importance of friendship, the rivalry among classmates, the racial issues and hostility as well as the aventures that young adults experience in contemporary Spain.

Las Barbaridades de Bárbara offers countless examples of the speech common of Spanish children and adults in the 90's: me parece/llevarse fatal (horrible), mosquearse (importarse), una birria (una porqueria), la muy pelota (tonta), más chivata (loca, fuerte) que la alarma de un coche, a lo hecho pecho (pagar las consecuencias), majareta (loco/a), darle a la botella (beber alcohol), echaba chispas (estar enojada), tragarse el cuento (creerse todo), ***mundialmente*** conocido (conocido por todos), un pelma (un idiota), dar la lata (seguir con lo mismo), ser una bicoca (un regalo, una ganga), ser un chollo (=ser bicoca), cara culo (cara de enojado/a), quedarse de piedra (quedarse inmóvil), un tio (un hombre, un chico), los pelotas (los idiotas), chivata (enojada), ser la pera (ser un problema), cabrearse (enojarse), picarse (enojarse), chalada (loco/a), colegas (compañeros) de clase, cortar el rollo (terminar), quedarse

patidifusa/o (quedarse soprendida/o, paralizada/o), ¡repollos colorados! (expresión de sorpresa), so burra (tan tonta), estar hecha polvo (estar destruida), cuchicuchicuchi (balbuceo usado con los niños), para peor (para colmo), de golpe y porrazo (de repente), un porrón (muchos) de años, ser meón (comportarse como un niño/a), ser cuca (ser lista), el follón (lio, problema), llorar a moco tendido (llorar mucho), ser zopenca (ser tonto), hala (vete), los tebeos (*Comics* para niños), las chocolatinas (barras de chocolate), los regalices (caramelos largos y negros de anis); use of american words: punki, gameboy; use of –illo/-illa: tonillo, feilla, rarilla ; use of nicknames that allude to the physical appearance of a person: Juan el Gordo, el Bestia, el Baboso, el Marciano.

Las Dos Marías

About the Author: Maria Inés Falconi (Argentina) is writer and educator who has formed part of the "Grupo Teatro Buenos Aires" since 1985 and has provided theatrical workshops at the Universidad Popular de Belgrano. She is the author of *Niños, las brujas no existen, Caidos del mapa, Hasta el domingo, Chau, señor miedo,* and *Cartas para Julia*. She has received numerous awards including the "Argentores en Teatro para Niños".

Las Dos Marías presents the life of an adolescent girl growing up in a middle-class family in Buenos Aires who encounters her first love. This novel combines domestic realism with social realism: It depicts the fights and successes of a modern middle-class family whose both parents work outside the house and have to attend to the developmental problems of their teenaged children. In addition, it presents the challenge of their grandmother's moving in with them. Lastly, with *Las Dos Marías* we learn about the hardships of immigrant Italians (Maria's great, great grandmother) sailing to Argentina seeking shelter after World War I. The author's inclusion of simplified Italian provides another authentic element that adds to the realistic nature of this novel. Maria's late great, great grandmother as well as her living grandmother have a strong influence in her life thus showing the respect that young adults, and Argentine society in general, have for the elderly.

Las dos Marías offers numerous examples of the speech common of Argentine children and adults today: pucherear (mostrar expresión de llanto), echar leña al fuego (dicir o hacer algo que aumenta el disgusto de una persona),¡qué bárbaro! (¡qué bueno!), bañadera (bañera), joderse (pagar las consecuencias), má (mamá), abu (abuela), che (expresión para llamar la atención de alguien), al cuete

(sin un objetivo claro), bancarse (aguantar), pendeja/o (insulto=persona inmadura), ser hincha pelotas (insulto=ser molesta/o), llevar el apunte (prestar atención / demostar interés en alguien), un embole (un problema / un aburrimiento), pasarlo joda (pasarlo muy bien), me cacho en la gran siete (expresión de disgusto), la vieja/ el viejo (la madre/el padre), tirarse un ratito (dormir un ratito), deschavarse (confesar la verdad, decir más de lo necesario), quedar libre en el colegio (perder el año escolar), tener a upa (levantar en brazos a un/a bebé/a o niño/a), transar (besar), hacer la gamba (hacer un favor/ hacer lo que un/a amigo/a pide), ser pajuerana (ser inocente/tonto/a), estar del tomate (estar enamorada, estar loca por alguuien), pibe/a (chico/a), un quilombo (palabra vulgar=un problema grande), dar bola (corresponder el interés por alguien), dar bolilla (=dar bola), el celador (persona en las escuelas que se encargan de mantener la disciplina), sonar (pasar algo malo), ser un plomo (ser un tonto), un pancho (salchicha con pan), un remise (similar a un taxi, servicio particular), un bondi (un ómnibus/autobús), pelotudo/a (insulto=idiota), boludo/a (insulto=idiota), largar a alguien (dejar a alguien en una relación amorosa), the use of 're' (= muy/mucho): rebueno, remal, requemar, reobvio, remoderna, recuidar, reasustada.

The House on Mango Street

About the Author: Sandra Cisneros (Mexico-USA), internationally known for her poetry and fiction, was born in Chicago in 1954. She is the daughter of a Mexican father and a Mexican-American mother and lives in San Antonio, Texas. Cisneros has worked as teacher, college recruiter, and art administrator. She has received numerous awards and is the author of *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, *My Wicked Wicked Ways*, and *Loose Woman*.

The House on Mango Street (*La Casa en Mango Street*, translated by Elena Poniatowska) contains a series of vignettes that eloquently depict the everyday life of a chicano girl, Esperanza, who has moved once again to a latino neighborhood in Chicago, but this time to a house of their own. Through Esperanza we acquaint with her family, particularly father and mother and younger sister, Nenny, other relatives, friends, and neighbors. With incredibele attention to detail, Cisneros presents the reality of living in a poor, "brown" neighborhood as seen through the eyes of a growing girl: This reality is a combination of sad events, innocent remarks, and hopeful thoughts and one in which the protagonist struggles to survive.

A number of references to Mexican, Chicano, and Latino cultures are found in this novel: older daughter being responsible for younger siblings, fortune tellers, 'mal de ojo', and religious figures and expressions, among others.

Other Books

Other Hispanic children's/juvenile books that have a strong socio-cultural value are:

From Argentina:
Soledad Va al Colegio by Maria Brandan Araoz, *De Barrio Somos* by Maria Cristina Ramos, *Azul La Cordillera* by Maria Cristina Ramos, *Pido Gancho* by Estela Smania, *Viaje al Pais de las Manzanas* by Camilo Guait, *Barbarita y el Angel* by Blanca Ravagnan de Jaccard.

From Puerto Rico:
Los Cuentos de Juan Bobo by Rosario Ferré, *Casi una Mujer* by Esmeralda Santiago.

From Mexico:
Casi Medio Año by Mónica Beltrán Brozón.

From Spain:
El Soñador Furtivo by Jesús Carazo, *Un Solo de Clarinete* by Fernando Almena, *Así es la Vida, Carlota* by Gemma Lienas, *Cucho* by José Luis Olaizola.

Implications

The literary works herein presented can be used in numerous ways: 1. As a basis for research on Hispanic children's/juvenile literature, 2. As part of a cultural readings course offered to prospective Spanish teachers, 3. As part of a seminar or advanced-level course offered to Spanish teachers, and 4. As part of the Spanish curriculum in both high school and university programs. With this selection, the author aims at providing a framework that would help to strengthen the role of Hispanic children's/juvenile literature in both research and teaching.

Notes

[1] For a complete history of children's literature in Spain and Hispanic America refer to Bravo-Villasante's work.

[2] Schon provides a series of comprehensive annotated bibliographies of Hispanic children's/juvenile books published until the early 1990's.

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